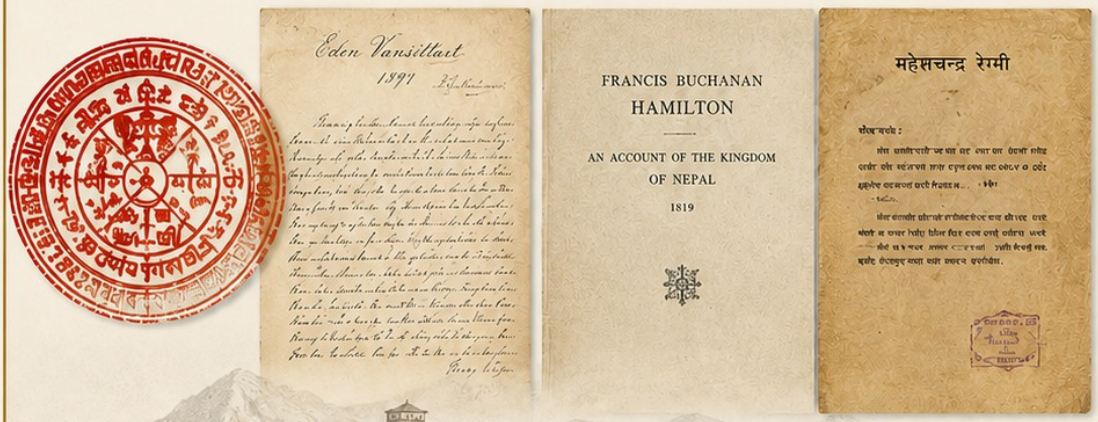
The Academic Resolution of the Vijaypur Dispute:

Shared Kirat History and the Foundation of the Royal Pagri

[A Study Based on Authentic Documents and Historical Red Seals of Eden Vansittart, Francis Buchanan Hamilton and Mahesh Chandra Regmi]



Author:

L.R. Sanyak (Limbu)

Publication Date:

20 July, 2026

Vijayapur Academic Resolution of the Dispute: Common Kirat History and the Background of the Royal Turban

Author: L.R. Sanyak (Limbu)
The historical legacy of Vijayapur in present-day eastern Nepal (especially the Limbuwan region of Koshi East and the Khambuwan region of Koshi West), the identity of ancient rulers, and the historical relationship between the Limbu and Rai castes have come to the surface from various angles. Whose was Vijayapur? Which caste did the historical ancient rulers there represent? What do the old red seals prove? Are terms like “Raya”, “Rai” or “Subba” caste-denoting terms or royal titles? An objective discussion of these questions based on historical documents and authenticated documents has become an academic necessity today.

1. The establishment of Vijayapur and the history before the Sena-Shah period:

The history of the establishment of Vijayapur and its political geography is very ancient and full of ups and downs. Long before the Sena kings made Vijayapur their capital and the Shah kings incorporated it into the Gorkha kingdom, the region was under the rule of the indigenous Kirant (Yakthung) Hangs.

A. Lineage of Soiyok Ladohang and Sanglaeing:

During the reign of the Thibong Yakthung (Ten Limbus), Soiyok Ladohang became the king of Chaubis Thum and built San-gadhi and Jalagadhi, ruling over both the hills and the Madhes (Soiyok Ladohang is considered by the Sanyak tribe Limbus of the ancient Chaubis region as their ancestor, while the Chemjong tribe Limbus also consider him their ancestor). Based on the same historical foundation, in 1421 B.S., Sanglaeing of the Limbu caste established a powerful kingdom in Morang (Source: Iman Singh Chemjong, 'Kirat History and Culture').

These ancient indigenous rulers of eastern Nepal, their descendants and original historical place are mentioned by Major Eden Vansittart in his book, quoting the historical account of the Ten Limbus:

"The Limbus or Yakthungbas are the oldest inhabitants of the country between the Arun river and the Kankai... Their traditions point to a time when they were ruled by their own independent chiefs or Hangs, long before the advent of the Senas or the Gorkhas." — Vansittart, Major Eden (1896), Gurkhas: Handbooks for the Indian Army, Calcutta: Government Printing, Chapter V, p. 112-114.

As the descendants and descendants of Sanglaeing gradually passed through generations (generations coming through Punglaing), the political and cultural influence of the Hindu Malla and Sen kings began to increase in the hilly and plains of Nepal. Due to this cultural interaction, the later descendants of Sanglaeing, Punglaeing, adapted their original Kiranti names and identities to the Hindu/Khas form that was considered prestigious at the time, adding "Raya". After king Punglaeing changed his name as Amar "Raya", the major rulers and talukdars of the eastern Kirat region started the tradition of attaching "Raya" after their names, which over time took the form of administrative and social identity (Source: Acharya, Baburam, BS 2024, 'A Brief History of Nepal', page 88).

B. Capital transfer from Waratappa:

During the reign of Vijaya Narayan Raya (Vijay Narayan Hang), the seventh-generation king of Sanglaing, it was decided to move the capital of the Morang kingdom to a more secure location. Vijaya Narayan's ancestors ruled from Waratappa, east of Vijayapur, to the southern plains of Morang (around present-day Rangeli). As external attacks and security challenges increased in the plains, King Vijaya Narayan made a historic agreement with Murehang Khewahang of the hills in 1641 B.S. According to the agreement, Vijaynarayan would be the king of Pahad-Madhes and Murehang Khewahang andTheir successors were ensured to be Chautaria (Prime Minister) in Vijayapur for generations.

Also, Representatives of ten Limbuwans were allowed to reside in Vijayapur for 6/6 months and conduct the affairs of the kingdom, and Vijaya Narayan himself moved the capital from Waratappa to Vijayapur, a hilly region of Dharan, and became the king. It was founded by Vijaya Narayan and hence its name is Vijayapur. This historical fact is clearly mentioned by Francis Buchanan Hamilton in his book in 1819.

"The Vijayanarayan Raja, who was a Limbu, and who founded the town of that name, having no children, adopted the ancestor of the family of the Choutariya, and left him his kingdom, which was probably then very small." — Hamilton, Francis Buchanan (1819), An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal, Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Company, p. 133.

2. The Vijayapur's Chautarias and Buddhikarna Raya:

The main political characteristic of the Vijayapur state is its dual system of government. Under this, the king was the highest office in the state, while the actual executive power of the government was in the hands of the local Kirat-affiliated "Chautaria".

A. Chautarias before Sen-dynasties and Buddhikarna:

The powerful role of the Chautarias in the history of Vijayapur is proven by the incident of V.S 1663. Murehang's son "Baju Raya" (Bajahang), who had made an agreement with Vijaya Narayan, sought military assistance from the Sen king Lohang Sen of Makwanpur in the process of overthrowing Vijaya Narayan Raya's rule. After the death of Waju Rai during the same conflict, Lohang Sen of Makwanpur entered Vijayapur and the Sen dynasty established its rule there. ButEven after the arrival of Lohang Sen, due to old agreements and the balance of political power, the executive authority of the hilly region remained secure in the hands of Limbu Chautaria. As British writer Hamilton mentions in his book:

"Lohanga, of the Makwanpur family, established his authority over the whole of the low country, while the Choutariya, who was a Limbu, continued to govern the hills, paying a small tribute to Lohanga, and acknowledging him as suzerain."— Hamilton, Francis Buchanan (1819), An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal, p. 134-135.

Even during the Sen period, the kirats continued to be the Chautarias according to the old agreement. During the reigns of Hari Narayan Sen and Mahipati Sen, Srichandra Raya and Vidyachandra Raya were the Chautarias. Shortly before Buddhikarna, when there was a power struggle between Chautaria Vichitra Raya and King Kamadatta Sen, Vichitra Raya had displaced the king and placeded his supporters in power. This shows that the Chautarias were more powerful and

decisive than the king in Vijaypur (Source:Nepal National Archive), 'Historical History of Vijaypur', Registration No. 4652).

B. Buddhikarna Raya: Is 'Khewa' Limbu or another identity:
During the time when Kamadatta Sen was the king of Vijayapur, the conflict between the king and the Chautaria reached its peak. Finally, in V.S 1826, Chautaria Buddhikarna Raya overthrew Kamadatta Sen and took complete control of the government., who is also known in history as the last ruler of Vijayapur (Source: Chemjong, Iman Singh (1967), 'Kirat History and Culture', Siliguri: Kirat Prakashani).

Regarding Buddhikarna's ethnic identity, historian Iman Singh Chemjong identifies him as a person of the Sankhuwasabha region and he is mentioned as a Limbu of the 'Khewahang' clan (Source: Chemjong, 1967, page 58). However, in the then East India Company and British military documents, he is referred to as 'Buddhikarna Raya' or 'Devan Bodhikarna Raya', according to the then administrative turban.
"Documents from British India records refer to him by his official administrative titles rather than a specific tribal identity, denoting him as 'Bodhikarna Raya' or 'Dewan'.— British Library, India Office Records, "Letters of the EIC to the Rulers of Nepal", Vol. 2, p. 89.
Since the descendants of Vijaya Narayan, the founder of Vijayapur, and Buddhikarna, the last powerful ruler, are found among the present-day Limbu (Yakthung) tribe, the fact that Buddhikarna was a powerful limbu ruler representing the Yakthung (Limbuwan) region is proven (Source: Subba, Chaitanya (1995), 'The Limbus of Eastern Nepal', p. 63).

3. Rai (Khambu) in Vijayapur Entry and participation:
Although the main administrative power of the Vijayapur court and the main influence of the Yakthung and Yakkha (Limbu/Dewan) related rulers remained in the territory east of the Arun,The role and entry of the ancestors of the current Rai (Khambu) community was equally important and participatory.

A. Entry and partnership from Middle-Kirat region: During the Sen period, the borders of the Vijayapur state extended to the western Dudhkoshi of the Arun River, so the Khambuwan region of

Kirat was also included in this state. The local heads of the Khambus, who lived in Hatuwagadhi and Chaudandi as their centers, were incorporated into the Vijayapur court by provided the title as of 'Kazi', 'Dvaiya' (tax collector) and military commander by the state system (Source: Hamilton, 1819, p. 148).

B. References to Ajit Rai and Saptaraj Rai: While taking over the command of Chaudandi, western part from Vijayapur, Khambu rulers like Ajit Rai and the local Hang Saptaraj Rai of Hatuwagadhi came to join into the Vijayapur royal system. They ruled using the title 'Raya' or 'Rai' in their areas, which established a strong presence and partnership of the Khambu (Rai) in the central government of Vijayapur. As mentioned by British author Eden Vansistert in his book:

"The title Rai, which was formerly used as a title of honor and office by the Khambus, has now practically become the name of the tribe... The Sena Rajas of Makwanpur and Bijaypur granted the title of Rai to the chiefs of the Khambus."— Vansittart, Major Eden (1896), Gurkhas: Handbooks for the Indian Army, Calcutta: Government Printing, Chapter V: The Limbu and Khambu Castes, p. 110-111.

4. Regarding the people connected to the Raya, Rai, and Subba of the Lalmohars who claim to be of their caste by various lineages:
Regarding the historical persons of the Lalmohars claimed by Limbu history writers and various Limbu clans in their respective family genealogies to understand the reality, it is necessary to look at the old government seals and the transcriptions of the original documents. The authentic texts of the three main seals preserved in the National Archives are presented here:

A. The red seal of the famous Treaty of Nupani of 1831 B.S.:
The original treaty paper in Nepali is as follows:
“□□□

□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□ □□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□, □□□□□□□□ □□□ □□□ □□□ □□□□□ □□□□ □□, □□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □ □□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□ □□□ □□ □□□□ □□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ □□□ □□□□ □□□□□□ □□□ □ □□□ □ □□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□” (□□□□□: □□□□□ □□□□□, □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□, □□□□□□□□, *□□□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□ □□. □, □□□□□□□□ □□. □□*)

(General meaning translation only:“SwastishriGirirajchakrachudamaniMaharajadhiraj shri shri shri prithvinarayanshah bahadurshamsher jungadevanamsda samarbijayinam...As Previously, Pallo Kirant East of Arun, Raihangs; Sun Raya, Kum Raya, Sumeu Raya, a pamphlet and a letter of seal to all the other Raya's, on this date, I have bound these conditions for you, This is my religion that the land you had got in the time of the Sen king, we have provided you again that, use and enjoy it according to the previous custom as long as my children live as you had previously enjoied it, date Vikram Sambat 1831 Shravan Badi 2 day 5, Location Darbar Kantipur.” (Source):Government of Nepal, National Archives, Kathmandu, Red Seal Registered Bag No. 2, Document No. 34.)

B. B.S. 1843 Subbangi certification Syahamohar:

This Syahamohar was issued during the reign of King Rana Bahadur Shah. The original copy in Nepali is as follows:

“□□□ □□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□□□ □□□ □□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□□□□ □ □□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□, □□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□ '□□□□□□' □□ □□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□ □ □–□□□□□ □□□□□ □□ □□□□ □□□□□□ □□ □□□□□□, □□□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□, □ □□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□ □□□ □ □□□ □□”

(□□□□□: □□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□, *□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□, □□□□□ □□. □□□□/□/□* (□□□□□□: □□□□□□, □□□□□□□□□□ (□□□□), Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal, p. 98).

(General meaning translation only: "In the name of the opinions of the Kirat Thum thums of the Arun Purba Pallo... "We have given you the same responsibilities for the same Thums and tied the turban of 'Subba' in your respective Thums which you had retained the administrative and tax collection authority during the time of the previous Sen kings, and from today onwards, collect taxes according to the law, settle disputes between villages, and pay the prescribed tax. Vikram Sambat 1843, Jyeshtha Badi 1, day 4.” (Source):Law bookstore, Collection of old red seals and sanads of Limbuwan, Registration No. 1843/2/1 (Quoted in: Regmi, Mahesh Chandra (1976), Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal, p. 98).

C. Vijayapur Gadhi Tax Management Red Seal (Lalmohar) of B.S 1864:

The original copy in Nepali is as follows:

“□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□ □□□ □□□ □□□□□□, □□□□□□□□ □ □□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□, □□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□ □□□ □□□□ □□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □ □□ □□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□ □□ □□□□□ □□ □□□□□ □□□□□□ □ □□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ □□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ □□ □□□ □ □”

(□□□□□: □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□, □□□□□□□□□, *□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□ □□. □ □□/□□* (□□□□□□: □□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□, *‘□□□□□□□□’ □□□□□□□□□□ □□, □□□□□ □□*).

(General meaning translation only: “Swastishree Girwanyuddha Vikram Shah... Further, the Kipatiya Rai Talukdars of Chainpur, Sambhugadhi and Chhathar areas, Atinanda Raya, Jang Raya, you shall collect the taxes and levies of the areas (Maujas) under the jurisdiction of Vijayapur Gadhi as before. If there is any court or dispute on the border of Kipat land, it shall be settled in the help of the Subba and Qazi of the Gadhi... Iti Sambat 1864, Ashwin Sudi 12 day 3.” (Source: National Archives, Kathmandu, Microfilm Roll No. A 23/14 (Quoted from History Revision Board, 'Purnima' Full Issue 68, page 44).

D. Historical Evidence of Gandaki and Western Nepal: Administrative Prevalence of the Title of Raya/Rai:

The greatest historical evidence that the word 'Raya' or 'Rai' was not a caste but merely an administrative office conferred by the state is the Gandaki and Karnali regions of western Nepal. The Shah and Malla kings had given the title of "Raya/Rai" to the Magars, Gurungs, Khas, and local Thakali and Bhote rulers/zamindars of the Gandak region long before the Kirat region for tax collection and local justice administration. There is much evidence in the old seals of Kaski, Lamjung, and Mustang where local Magar and Gurung incumbents are addressed as 'Raya'. This fact has been clearly mentioned by Mahesh Chandra Regmi while studying the land reform and talukdari system of the Gandak region:

"The institutional use of the title 'Rai' or 'Raya' was not confined to the Kirat region. Long before the Gorkha expansion, the rulers of Western Nepal and the Gandaki zone routinely conferred the title of 'Raya' upon local Magar, Gurung, and Khas chieftains who were

responsible for collecting revenue and maintaining law and order in their respective hills." (Regmi, Mahesh Chandra (1978), Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces: Peasants and Landlords in 19th-Century Nepal, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, Chapter 4, p. 56-58.)

Therefore, just as the Magars or Gurungs of the Gandaki region retained their original caste name (Magar/Gurung) despite receiving the title 'Raya/Rai' and did not convert it into a caste, similarly the Khambus in eastern Nepal assimilated that common royal title as their caste identity (Rai caste) over time. This proves that the origin of the word 'Rai' was originally administrative and state-based, not caste-based.

5. Major Eden Vansittart's Evidence of 'Gurkhas': Transformation of Titles

The official book prepared in 1896 by Major Eden Vansittart of the British Gurkha RegimentIn 'Gurkhas: Handbooks for the Indian Army', he has recorded a very important memoir about how the administrative ranks and turbans of the inhabitants of eastern Nepal transformed into ethnic identity.

- **As a title 'Raya' and 'Rai':** According to Vansittart, the Sen kings initially bestowed the title of 'Raya' on the Khambu rulers of the Kirats, which later became 'Rai' through colloquial and local corruption. This was only the title of the talukdars who were responsible for collecting taxes and settling local disputes at that time (Vansittart, 1896, p. 110).
- **Limbu gets the title of 'Subba':** The Shah kings annexed Vijayapur to Nepal in 1774 AD (1831 V.S) and then the Limbu (Yakthung)Given the title 'Subba'.
  "The title Subba was first given to the Limbus by the Gorkha government after the conquest of Kirat. Like the title 'Rai' among the Khambus, 'Subba' was originally an official title given to the chiefs, but in course of time, it has been widely used by the Limbus." (Vansittart, Major Eden (1896), Gurkhas: Handbooks for the Indian Army, p. 115.)

6. Conclusion:

An objective study of the historical legacy and the titles associated with it reveals that the history of Vijayapur is not about division., but

rather shows a strong foundation of mutual unity and partnership. Dharan's Vijayapur Gadhi was not the exclusive domain of any one caste but was a common political place for the ancestors of Limbu (Yakthung), Rai (Khambu) and Yakkha (Dewan) at various periods; where they collectively governed the state by making historical agreements and understandings with Vijaya Narayan and later the Sena kings.

Historical and administrative transformation of the titles of Subba and Raya/Rai in the Gandaki region and Limbuwan, the transfer of the capital from Waratappa to Vijayapur, and the fact that only royal titles are mentioned in old red seals (Lalmohar) without modern surnames, reveal the true nature of the history of the Limbu and Rai castes. Therefore, the best, just and academic way to resolve this historical dispute is for the current generation to take off their narrow caste glasses and accept and assimilate the historicity of Vijayapur, respect their common and glorious Kirati history, and jointly protect Vijayapur.

2083 Shravan-4, Monday